Sacred Journey

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Summer 2011
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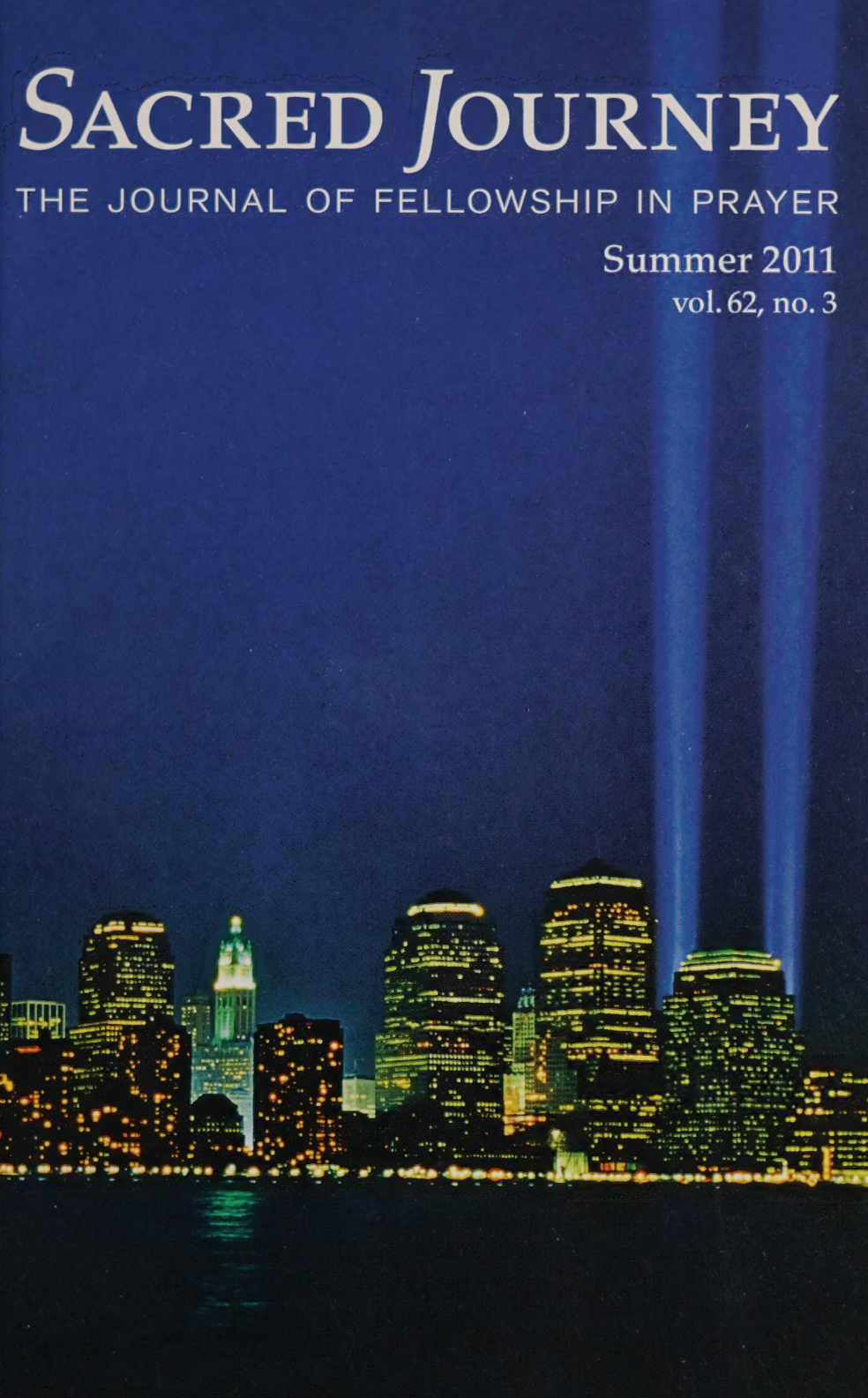

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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Fellowship In Prayer

encourages and supports
a spiritual orientation to life,

promotes the practice
of prayer, meditation,
and service to others,

and helps bring about
a deeper spirit of unity
among humankind.

SACRED JOURNEY

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We welcome submissions of articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience and practice, religious faith or similar topics, as well as prayers and poetry. We look for writing that expresses an individual's personal experience while also conveying a deeper message of universal appeal. Writing must be accessible to people of all traditions. Please include a brief biography and full contact information: name, address, phone numbers and email. Articles should not exceed 1500 words and should be submitted to the editor by email: submissions@sacredjourney.org. If necessary, they may be mailed.

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Abraham, Our Father and George Washington, the Father of Our Country

In May of this year Fellowship In Prayer co-sponsored the annual Table of Abraham luncheon, which amongst other things celebrates the towering figure of the patriarch Abraham, from whom Islam, Christianity and Judaism claim the origins of their heritage. For that lunch I was invited to prepare some welcoming comments and I have incorporated some of those words into my quarterly letter. The lunch took place in the dining room at Princeton Theological Seminary, which itself is located only a few hundred yards from the historic site of the Battle of Princeton.

In 1776 General George Washington met with mixed fortunes. In the Spring he defeated the British at the battle of Bunker Hill and routed them from the Boston Common. Later that year he totally got it wrong and experienced humiliating defeats in New York and Brooklyn. By the end of the year he was short on arms, supplies and money. His army was deserting, so he attempted one last desperate gamble. He crossed the Delaware entered Trenton on New Year's Day and soundly defeated the garrison there. A couple of days later, he marched up Princeton Pike and on January 3, 1777 won a decisive victory at the Battle of Princeton.

Nice story you may say, but why do we need a limey (slang for an Englishman)—a Jewish one at that—telling us about American history, which he probably picked up from one reading of David McCullough's 1776 (I did) and furthermore, what does it have to do with Abraham?

I guess a loose connection could be made between Abraham being the father of monotheism and George Wash-

ington being the father of our country. But there is a deeper connection that is found in the letter President George Washington wrote to the Jewish congregation of Touro, Rhode Island in August 1790; the Jewish community originally wrote to the President, "Deprived as we have been of the individual rights of free citizens; we now behold a Government erected by the majesty of the people, whose basis is philanthropy, mutual confidence and public virtue."

Washington seems to have been deeply touched by their letter. To assure the Jewish community that America would always be open to them, he responded:

> May the children of the stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the goodwill of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit safely under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.

He then goes on to describe the type of society he hoped would develop in the United States "a government . . . which gives bigotry no sanction, persecution no assistance, and requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens."

Three times a day Jews invoke the G-d of Abraham and ask for his protection, "King, Helper, Savior, Shield: Blessed are you our G-d, Shield of Abraham."

Within Christians, Muslims and Jews as indeed within all humanity, a small spark of Abraham resides . . . George Washington understood this and created a society that allowed that spark to shine

From the little I understand of Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition, Abraham is associated with the divine attribute known as *chesed*, literally translated as loving-kindness. Perhaps, we owe it to ourselves to more closely investigate the common source of our traditions, it appears that they were once united within the soul of a single individual, whose life is not

associated with accumulating power and wealth, but rather with a higher ideal.

As we mark the tenth anniversary of 9/11, perhaps we should reflect on our cultural chasm and ask why events like 9/11 occur. Have we so far removed ourselves from the source of our soul, the aspect of our essence that is common to all of us? How can we re-connect and realize the great destiny that Abraham intended for all his children?

Please enjoy this issue of *Sacred Journey*.

Sincerely.

David Newton

David Newton is President of Fellowship In Prayer.

Into the Light

JANET M. HAAG

My husband was on his way to the World Trade Center the morning of September 11, 2001. For several agonizing hours following the attacks, I had no idea whether he was alive or dead. As it turned out, he had uncharacteristically overslept —missing his train, putting him at the subway stop immediately before the Trade Center when the Towers collapsed. I remember thinking later that day that my world would never be the same, that I would never feel as safe and secure as I once had—and my personal experience was only a tiny shadow in the overwhelming darkness.

9/11 is akin to other defining moments in recent US history—like the bombing of Pearl Harbor or the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Individuals, our nation, the world is qualitatively different following every such event. And ten years after 9/11 the question remains, "How does it define us? How do we want it to define us?

The personal, the political, the religious (the irreligious) are all closely intertwined, value-laden and powerfully motivating. In the passionate pursuit of what we care about most, we can lose perspective. We can slip into thinking our way is the right way, and then, the only way. This kind of arrogance leads to violence in an effort to gain or retain power. We saw it in the violence of 9/11. We saw it in the violence after 9/11.

These same motivators, however, can move us to greatness, call us to see beyond ourselves, our own way, to embrace our common humanity through compassion. The word compassion comes from the Latin *compati*, which means to "suffer with," and when we open ourselves to share another's pain, we are present with them in a way that helps them to heal. Mystics and saints from all traditions, wise men and

women throughout the ages have taught us this. We saw it in the outpouring of love and compassion on 9/11, on 9/12, and in the days, months and years thereafter. Each of us holds within us the power to decide if/when we will emerge from the shadows into the light.

In this issue of *Sacred Journey*, we invite you to remember and to re-choose how 9/11 and experiences like it will define you. SJ

Janet M. Haag is the Executive Director of Fellowship In Prayer.

An Interview with Valarie Kaur

Valarie Kaur is an award-winning filmmaker, public speaker and writer in her third year at Yale Law School. She has harnessed multiple tools to advocate on behalf of communities swept up in hate crimes, racial profiling and immigration policies. Valarie wrote and produced Divided We Fall *(2008), the first feature film on racism in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and winner of more than a dozen international awards. She has been featured in print, radio and television media such as* CNN, NPR *and the* BBC.

Valarie earned her bachelor's degree in religious studies and international relations with honors at Stanford University. She went on to study narrative ethics, receiving her masters in theological studies at Harvard Divinity School as a Harvard Presidential Scholar.

Now at Yale Law School, Valarie studies and advocates on civil issues and serves as the founding director of the Yale Visual Law Project, an alternative law journal. As part of her clinical work, she has represented individuals arrested in immigration raids and brought national attention to the problem of racial profiling and police brutality in East Haven, CT.

In June 2009, Valarie reported on the military commissions at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as a representative of the National Institute of Military Justice. She served as a legal clerk on the Senate Judiciary Committee for Senator Russell Feingold.

She joined Auburn Theological Seminary in 2011 as the director of Groundswell, a broad-based initiative to spark and empower the multifaith movement for justice.

Fellowship In Prayer: You are a young, bright and talented Sikh-American, deeply invested in mobilizing the emerging generation to find common ground and bridge religious divides. What motivates and inspires you to pursue this course?

Valarie Kaur: The concept of *seva* is at the heart of the Sikh tradition. Seva means service, selfless service on behalf of and for the betterment of the community. I am motivated by this idea that by serving other people, I connect to the Divine. The call to service, to justice, is inherent in my upbringing as a Sikh. My grandfather, who helped raise me, embodied this way of living. He was a soldier during WWII and he was also a poet—a man, who in his own way, in his own circle, lived a life of utter fearlessness.

On his deathbed, consumed by Parkinson's disease, my grandfather could barely move his eyes back and forth and yet, I remember he was able to look at each one of us and smile. He was fearless in the face of death, surrendering himself to it. At first I recall feeling angry that he died without teaching me to be as fearless as he was. Then I started to think that he had done so much good in the world, with such joy and lightness, without the kind of despair that I often encounter in people who are focused on justice work, so all I had to do was walk in his footsteps. He demonstrated that joy in the pursuit of justice isn't dependent only on the outcome; the process itself can be joyful.

And so I have this practice now that I call my Lifetime Practice. Each night before I go to sleep, I think of my day as an entire lifetime, with a beginning, middle, and end. I locate the part of that day that was hardest and think about how I overcame it. I locate the part that was most joyful and for which I am grateful. Sometimes this is difficult but I always find something that brought me joy and gratitude. This practice has carried me through trying times, such as visiting Guantanamo

as a legal observer, or advocating against racial profiling on the streets of East Haven, or working in the US Senate. Any passionate work, especially the pursuit of justice, can often feel all-consuming. So the real challenge is: can I let go of this day, this lifetime? Can I surrender it as fearlessly as my grandfather did? Can I accept that my work will not end the world's injustices in a day, in a lifetime? It will take ages beyond my lifetime. Can each of us simply own whatever small role we take in this process, and let it be enough, let it be fulfilling? Can we find joy in it?

Did your grandfather engage in this kind of intentional life care practice?

At sunset every day, my grandfather would walk around his garden and water the plants. He was a military man so it was almost like he was surveying his vegetables as if they were his soldiers! But as the sun set and he was walking and watering, he would recite the sacred scripture. I think there's something in the Sikh tradition, in fact in many traditions, where the recitation of scripture is a way for people to break open the ego, the "I," and merge into what is experienced as the Infinite. I think this is what he did and it is part of my personal practice as well.

Does prayer play a role in your advocacy?

Yes, I think it does. You can call it prayer or meditation; you can call it stillness or emptiness but these moments of losing oneself in the Infinite, whether we use music, or the recitation of scripture, or the kind of embodied experience that I engage in each night. Whatever it is called, it is a way of being deeply grounded every day. It's not like on Sunday mornings, I pray, and the rest of the time, I live. It is about walking every day in a way that is grounded and meditative, spilling over into every aspect of life. The Sikh faith is intended to cultivate recognition of the radical

interconnectedness of oneself and all other beings so we walk with a sense of compassion all the time. We all struggle with this but the more we make it a conscious practice, the more it will characterize us.

How do you pray in the Sikh tradition?

In Sikhism, the idea of community—the *sanghat*—the blessed community, is really strong. Our house of worship is the *gurdwara* and it is open to anyone. Unlike more traditional places of worship, we do not gather at the gurdwara to listen to sermons, we come to hear the scriptures being sung. The idea is to absorb the Word, the Name, in order to lose ourselves and merge into what is beyond. This happens while we are in community, which seems contradictory, doesn't it? But the idea is that we are not saved as individuals and we're not saved in the afterlife either. Our salvation, our liberation is here and now. Salvation is lived, and to liberate ourselves, we have to liberate every single one of us; every blade of grass.

Gathering at the gurdwara is very special and important, so I go whenever I can. Currently, I am in law school and I don't have a car and there is no gurdwara around. I miss it but there is an Episcopal church next to my house and on Sunday nights, they offer Compline services. It's all darkness and incense and candlelight and that's where I am able to replicate for myself the kind of emptying out I would experience at the gurdwara.

You've mentioned the Sikh sacred scriptures several times, where did they originate?

In the Sikh tradition there are ten Gurus or teachers starting with Guru Nanak (1469-1539). It was a time of religious strife when, as the story goes, Nanak disappeared. After three days he emerged from the river and said that he had been taken to God's court and given *amrita* (nectar) to drink, He said he had been told to rejoice in the name of God and to teach others to

do the same. His first pronouncement was, "God is neither Hindu nor Muslim, and the path I follow is God's." Nanak wanted to bring people together not just in a vision of God as one, but with a vision of humanity as one. He did this through poetry, music and song. He began preaching a mystical vision through sound, as part of the *nirguna bhakti* tradition—a devotional tradition guided in love and praise of the one formless divine.

Over the centuries, these sacred hymns started being recorded and finally during the time of the fifth to the tenth guru, they began to be compiled in a sacred scripture called the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji proclaimed there wouldn't be any more gurus in the flesh after him. He said the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred text, would be the eleventh and eternal guru. So when Sikhs go into the gurdwara, the sacred scripture, the source of wisdom is at the center of the house of worship and everything revolves around it. This scripture is not a text that preaches or provides rules, or a narrative set in stone. It is all poetry—filled with light and subject to many interpretations. The poetry itself is to be understood as a vessel, a means of transportation beyond the confines of language. It is a beautiful text; a tapestry of sorts assembled from many different voices. It doesn't just have Sikh voices; it has Muslim voices; Hindu voices, and any words or hymns that at that time were considered wise and captured a vision of oneness.

In the wake of September 11, you set off across the country to film what became an award-winning documentary, *Divided We Fall*, why did you think telling stories of violence against Muslim, Sikh and Arab-Americans was so important?

First of all, I think that more than any law or lecture or report, stories have the power to change people from the inside; to transform hearts and minds. And stories break open the doors of our hearts, especially when they come from people in whom

we would never expect to see ourselves. Without our even knowing it, we are drawn into the storytellers' experiences. After 9/11, people had hundreds and thousands of stories of what it was like to suddenly be seen as the enemy. Suddenly, people who the day before had been neighbors, doctors, taxicab drivers, even kids at the local school—anyone who had brown skin—not just Sikh and Muslim Arab-Americans, but Latinos and Native Americans—all of them suddenly became possible enemies.

A whole range of our population was cast as automatically suspect, perpetually foreign, and potentially terrorist. This showed up in all kinds of ways. Our "new normal" discrimination showed up in our laws, in our policies, in how we were fighting the war on terror and in how we thought we needed to secure our nation here at home. It also showed up on the street, in our interactions with one another and in violence. But violence is only the last act in a series of acts that dehumanize the other: it all begins with our moral imagination. I think most people who picked up a newspaper and read about Frank Rogue, who shot and killed Balbir Singh Sodhi outside of his gas station just days after 9/11 because he thought he was a terrorist simply because he was wearing a turban, would not have identified with Frank. Yet most people who saw a turbaned man on an airplane after 9/11 probably felt a little nervous. This is the shared moral imagination that we can transform with our stories. While it's not exactly measurable, I believe that if we can shape and expand our moral imagination so there is no stranger, so we don't cast someone as the other, but instead recognize their humanness and see them the way that they want to be seen, then we have a starting point to get at the structures of injustice in our lives. This is why I think storytelling is so important.

When I first started touring the country with my film, I thought my purpose was to show people stories they didn't know, stories about what was happening in the community. I was amazed to discover they already knew these stories well because they saw themselves in them through their own

community's experiences. Japanese-Americans talked about their own experiences or the experiences of their grandparents during WWII. Native Americans talked about the genocide of their community, a legacy that impacts them to this day. An African-American man in Chicago pointed to his braids and said, "My braids are my turban." Gay people fighting for the right to live openly readily understood why Sikhs felt the need to fight for the right to wear their turbans.

Once a story is told well, it invites remarkable gestures of solidarity. People are moved to stand up for one another. It may not seem like much when we are sitting in an audience and see someone cry and our heart hurts, or we hear something said that alters our thinking, but the ripple effects from such moments of recognition are immeasurable. I really do believe stories have the power to change the world. Stories shape public opinion and apply pressure on legal and political institutions to expand the circle of belonging to include all of us, even in times of crisis.

It was a very tumultuous time after 9/11; how did you find the courage to proceed?

There's a fine line between being courageous and being naïve! I was so young, only twenty at the time, and wonderfully reckless. I didn't know how dangerous it would be to go into the heartland of the United States with my bearded cousin wearing his turban. I didn't know how traumatized I would feel as I absorbed the stories of people who had just endured severe violence. We went to places where the blood was still fresh on the ground, metaphorically speaking; It was actually a time of great trial for me as I came to see myself through the eyes of people who didn't see me as American. Nonetheless, I credit this experience with forging my call to tell the stories that have to be told to help transform our moral imagination.

As we prepare to mark ten years since 9/11, what should we have learned?

I think we have to realize that we can only let fear drive our sense of self-preservation for so long before it starts to compromise the very things worth protecting. After a decade of the 'war on terror,' (although we aren't calling it that anymore), we have not accomplished that much. Many Bush-era polices that demarcated a whole segment of the population as suspect have compromised the rights of many innocent people. The Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp remains open. By now, I think we should have learned that we can't fight terrorism by repeating the violence done to us. We are not yet healed as a nation.

On 9/11 I think the terrorists acted out of their sense of woundedness. We as a nation have acted out of our sense of woundedness. Frank Rogue murdered Balbir Singh Sodhi out of a sense of woundedness. The Sikh man who comes home because, on the street, he's been called a "bin Laden" ten, twenty, thirty times in a week and is aggressive toward his wife is acting out of his pain and woundedness. Such cycles of violence are perpetuated when the initial wound in ourselves is left unhealed. Since 9/11 we have not healed as individuals and we have not healed as a nation. When we recognize the political is personal and the personal is political, we will have agency to begin to engage in the healing process. Sikhs and Muslims alike are called to look within right now, to see the ways that they have been damaged or broken by living in the shadows. I think every American is called to look within right now and think about what it means to live in a world where fear hijacks our sense of humanity.

We need to reaffirm our commitment to assuring the rights of every person regardless of citizenship, seeing them as equals even though they may look and live differently than we do. It will take us decades to heal but I think a groundswell of people is in the process of healing. I really believe it is possible because I've seen it.

What has convinced you we can heal?

Let me tell you my story of healing. I was wrongfully arrested on the streets of New York City during the 2004 Republican National Convention. I was there as a legal observer with my camera, documenting the protests when the police arrested me for disorderly conduct. The charge was dismissed but I was held for sixteen hours and injured while in custody. When I asked an officer to loosen the handcuffs that were cutting off circulation in my hands, he retorted, "We're not here to make you comfortable." Then he twisted my arm. It felt like someone was slicing my hand off. I opened my mouth to scream but I couldn't. All that came to mind was the opening passage from scripture, starting with *Ik Oankar* (God is One). . . .

These words carried me through a moment of intense pain. While I was behind bars, I remember thinking, "I'm a citizen. I'm educated. I'm articulate. What happens to people without these advantages?" This thought was so terrifying that I knew I would have to do something to help people in situations like this. It is what prompted me to apply to law school. I knew I needed to understand power and be able to engage with power if I was ever going to be an effective advocate. I can still remember the face of the police officer who hurt me whose face haunted me for a really long time. I could not bring myself to think of him as a father who could go home and kiss his kids good night. I could only see him as the white, anxiety-filled officer who took his aggression out on me.

It wasn't until I spent a week at Guantanamo observing the military commission and talking with the soldiers that I began to think differently about this. I was astonished to see these soldiers living a seemingly normal life, operating inside a camp that had become the symbol for one of the greatest injustices of our time. It dawned on me that these young men were kids when 9/11 happened and they enlisted in the army in order to fulfill a sense of duty and patriotism, but they hated being at Guantanamo. Many of them talked about themselves as if

they were the ones who were being held prisoner. One soldier claimed, "The detainees get more freedom than we do." Many of them felt trapped by a system that was asking them to dehumanize. This is when I began to understand just how much we are all trapped by such systems; we are all prisoners to the difficulties and struggles we have inherited from generations before us. With this insight, I was able to find in myself the ability to forgive. Finally, I could see the face of the officer who hurt me and forgive him, understanding that he too was trapped by a system that called him to hurt. Once we as a nation are able to really listen to the stories of those we consider our enemies and understand the woundedness from which they act, then we will have taken the first step on our path toward healing.

Where is our hope in the future?

My hope for the future lies in the emerging generation, young people certainly, but not only my peers. It also lies with those from all generations who share the qualities of youth; the ability to dream; to re-envision; to act out of courage rather than timidity; to take risks and to adhere to what is becoming the world view of this millennium one that holds pluralism and diversity not as an aim, but as a reality. My generation is the most diverse generation in the history of this country; we have grown up in the Web 2.0 world where we're able to express our diversity in ways that our parents could never have imagined. We have the ability to build communities—real and virtual, that recognize everyone can coordinate and organize—take action.

Our experience means my generation doesn't see the great challenges of our time as separate issues but as deeply interconnected. Racial justice is connected to economic justice; hate crimes to domestic violence; raising the visibility of Native Americans to protecting Muslim-Americans from indiscriminate violence. All the challenges we are facing are not complicated in that we need a set of experts in some ivory tower to tell

us what to do. Rather, they are complex, interconnected, global, systemic, and therefore, require new avenues for social change. Open source digital tools invite mass collaboration and participation in ways that we have not seen before. We've seen their effectiveness in movements to stop the genocide in Darfur, in the 2008 presidential campaign, and in efforts to address climate change. More and more, young people are using these tools in really exciting ways. It is happening throughout the Middle East including the revolution in Egypt. This gives me tremendous hope as we will pass this baton to future generations. There is always that split second in a relay race when two teammates are holding the baton together. Right now I feel we are in one of those moments.

What are the defining characteristics of the emerging generation when it comes to matters of faith and spiritual practice?

According to the research, young people say that whether they're evangelical or Buddhist or Muslim or atheist, they adhere less to dogma and more to the call to love one another. I believe our willingness to see faith as a living breathing entity that we have a role in shaping means we call on the moral vision of faith to meet social challenges here and now. This perspective makes for multi-faith collaborations that are not just about dialog, but about joining hands and taking action. Whereas in the not so distant past, it was novel to have a Buddhist and a Christian in the same room talking with one another, my generation has grown up talking with each other on Facebook, Twitter and the Blogosphere. The question we're asking is, "So what are we going to do together?" Young people today are coming into leadership positions, allying themselves with people from previous generations, and organizing with a new moral vision that is quite enlivening.

Do you find this to be very different from the rancor that characterized the 60s?

I think it's important to remember there is a place for protesting, to call for change from outside institutions of power. In the 60s, a lot of protesters fought with anger and in many circumstances, their rage was justified because they believed there were no avenues for them to effect change. Today's emerging generation is calling for change and wants to go a step further to create that change. Our technologies now allow us to engage in democratic deliberation—in problem solving and organizing in ways that equip all of us to become bold and resilient leaders. A fellow Millennial, Jared Duval, puts it this way:

> On the Internet, we now have Wikipedia that logs everything in the store of human knowledge. We couldn't have imagined this existing a couple of decades ago, right? Wikipedia describes what the world is but can you imagine harnessing these same tools to shape what the world ought to be?

We understand you launched the Common Ground Campaign in 2010 to respond to the wave of anti-Muslim sentiments sweeping across our country. Do you think it is having a transformative effect?

The Common Ground Campaign has grown into a broad-based initiative called Groundswell. We are in the beginning stages, growing the vision. We could just fly into action, but I am very conscious that we need to think carefully about what we are doing because too often organizations embody the very dysfunctions they are trying to heal. I am very conscious that we need to embody our vision by cultivating an ethic that values health and wholeness as we work together, one in which everyone can flourish. We come from very different backgrounds and we're all in Groundswell for common cause. Currently, we are in a campaign to launch Groundswell on September 11, 2011. There are individuals, organizations, and congregations, especially on college campuses, holding events to invite introspection and

storytelling, compassion and creative forward-looking action as we mark the 10th anniversary of 9/11. Divisiveness is not the only narrative out there. We are inviting groups to self-identify as part of a groundswell and publicize the fact there is an emerging generation here and now who are ready to form a moral vision for a better world.

Why do you think it is important for this movement to be multifaith?

There is no other way. There is no way forward if we take a separatist approach. All the issues are part of a constellation and we can't effectively address them if we treat them as separate, as if the immigration issue is separate from the racial issue, or the LGBT issue or the poverty issue. We can't expect to affect a shift in consciousness if we operate only as Muslims, or Christians, or atheists. It is impossible to make significant advances unless we are brave enough to build coalitions that haven't existed before. I've seen the transformation that occurs when we act in concert. I experienced this with the group of people who made *Divided We Fall* and that social action campaign. I've seen it with the people involved in Common Ground and now with Groundswell. We come from different races, religions, cultures, sexual orientations, and yet, we have much in common. It is not because we're the same, but precisely because we are different, and value our differences that we can draw on them to craft a shared moral vision. This vision is inherently pluralistic, all encompassing, and the only kind of approach, I believe, that can offer our world real hope.

Your words are beautiful. Thank you for sharing your story and your vision with us. We wish you much success with the launch of Groundswell.

It's all my pleasure!

How Should I Think About This?

WESTINA MATTHEWS

"How should I think about this?"

I was recently sitting with a friend on her back porch, catching up and discussing current events, when she told me this question had been raised by her eleven year old daughter after Osama Bin Laden's assassination. Emily was only a year old when the four coordinated suicide attacks by al-Qaeda occurred, so she has grown up in New York City, in the shadows of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. I marvel that such a young voice can offer such a profound question, "How should I think about this?"

This question is one I have been asking myself over the past ten years because on September 11, 2001, I found myself running down thirty-three flights of stairs in the World Financial Center, out the door and over the Brooklyn Bridge, with two towers billowing fire and smoke behind me. As I was fleeing for my life, the first of the two towers began to collapse and I had to leap over people who were tripping and falling in the sheer terror and confusion of it all. Not daring to look back, I kept on running forward; the smoke, the ashes, the debris fast approaching from behind, as if chasing me across the bridge. All I had were the clothes on my back, my purse, and prayer. Two weeks later I wrote in my journal:

> I carry in my back pack: my wallet with credit cards and extra cash; my passport; a bottle of water; three days worth of my prescriptions; my cell phone with its charger; a metro pass; my blackberry; extra AA batteries; a granola bar; and a paper mask to cover my nose and mouth in case of an emergency. And on my feet, I wear flat, comfortable shoes.

Now, when sirens go off from police cars or fire trucks or ambulances, I find myself diving for cover under my desk, or huddling in a corner in my apartment. I go to sleep at night—when I can sleep—on the couch with the television turned to the news station.

I asked a therapist if this was "crazy" behavior . . . and she reassured me—given the circumstances—it was quite normal. "Post traumatic stress," she called it. It is as though . . . because it has a name, it is somehow supposed to make it—or me—better.

I am not better . . . not yet . . . but one day soon, with God's good grace, I will be.

Months after that fateful day, as I was leaving my parish located not far from the World Trade Center—where I had stopped to light

> In order to move on . . .
> forgiveness is necessary,
> but it is a long and arduous process.

a candle and pray for God to help me forgive—I saw the (now famous) twenty foot cross made of two steel beams, jutting up from the enclosed fence. In that moment, I knew within my soul I needed to begin the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. And I wondered, "How should I think about this?"

The tenth anniversary of September 11th highlights a tragedy that will be difficult, if not impossible, to forget. And while the terror of my own experience is becoming a somewhat distant memory, I am clearly reminded of the large-scale devastation of that event each time I walk by the construction site to my place of worship. Lives and jobs were lost, buildings were destroyed, and America will never be the same. But through God's grace, my heart has softened and my fear has been replaced by love.

This year also markes the twentieth anniversary (February 11th) of Nelson Mandela's release from the Victor Verster Prison in Paarl. When I was in South Africa two years ago, I had the opportunity to visit Robben Island where Mandela spent eighteen of his twenty-seven years in prison. I saw the conditions under which he had to live—confined to a small cell, the floor for his bed, a bucket for his toilet—and he labored in a quarry which nearly blinded him. I continue to wonder how President Mandela and Bishop Tutu have been able to embrace the concept of peace and reconciliation, given the horrendous conditions of apartheid. I then feel ashamed by the temptation to harden my heart in response to perceived or real injustices, large or small. I am convinced these great men must have also grappled with the question, "How should I think about this?"

A few months ago I was in Burundi, a country in central Africa, that has only recently ended twelve years of civil war. President Mandela served as one of their mediators. This civil war has left behind many orphans, widows, HIV-infected people, and street children; and the church has become a place of comfort, love, peace, and reconciliation. I spent time with Burundians who likewise ask, "How should we think about this?" One pastor shared that he was almost killed five times, twice by members of his own ethnic tribe. Yet, this man pastors everyone he meets, preaching love and forgiveness. Another pastor shared that he was only six when his missionary father and sister were killed, another sister mutilated, and his two-year old brother poisoned by a neighbor. When I asked both pastors if they were Hutu or Tutsi, they responded, "Why does it matter? We are one people. We must move on."

In order to move on, I have learned forgiveness is necessary, but it is a long and arduous process. It unfolds through a prayer, that is repeated often before being realized;

I want to, want to, want to forgive
I want to, want to forgive
I want to forgive
I forgive.

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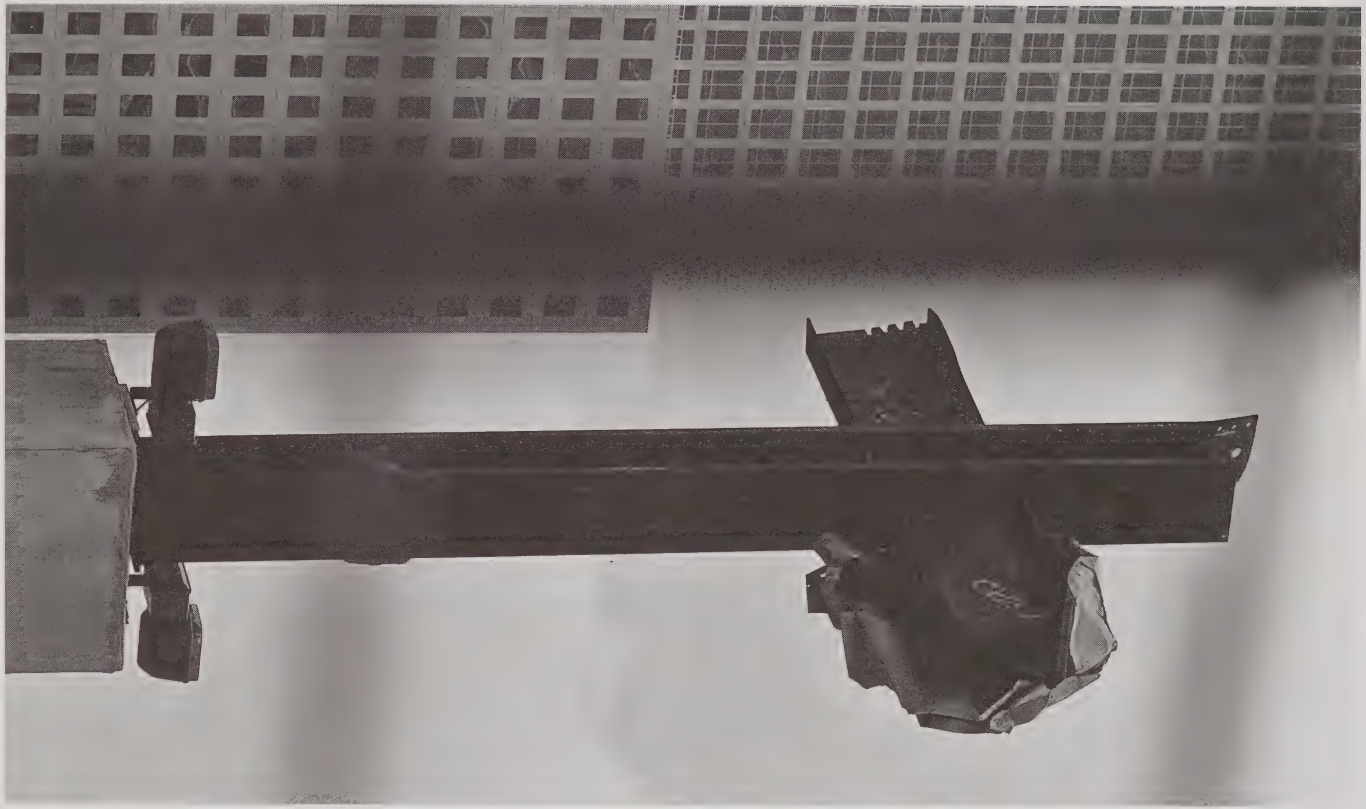

We can learn much from those around the world who have already journeyed down the path of forgiveness and reconciliation—whether in South Africa, or Burundi, or closer to home—a neighbor, colleague, or family member. We have to learn to forgive if we are to move on with our lives in the midst of broken promises, broken dreams, and broken relationships.

My friends, some of you may be in a dark place right now—grieving over a tragedy in your life that may or may not have anything to do with September 11th. You may be feeling the kind of heartache or heartbreak that places your soul in the "lost and found." You might be carrying your own invisible backpack generated by a hardened heart; an unwillingness to forgive; an inability to let go of the past. Your passport might be stamped with fear, anguish, and uncertainty. Perhaps, you have nightmares over past hurts and injustices, real or imagined, and you mask your trembling lips and tearful eyes with a fake smile. Living in God's fullness of life cannot be done in this valley of resentment and unforgiveness. Transformation must come from within. If you want to set yourself on a path to forgiveness and reconciliation, you might begin by asking the same question an eleven year old girl so wisely asked, "How should I think about this?" SJ

Westina Matthews, PhD, worked on Wall Street for over twenty-four years. A member of Trinity Wall Street, she is now an author, spiritual director, retreat leader, inspirational speaker, and adjunct professor whose practice fosters contemplative living through "holy listening."

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IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE KIND OF PERSON I AM
AND I DON'T KNOW THE KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE
A PATTERN THAT OTHERS MADE MAY PREVAIL IN THE WORLD
AND FOLLOWING THE WRONG GOD HOME
WE MAY MISS OUR STAR.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

THE MOST DIFFICULT THING OF ALL—
YET THE MOST ESSENTIAL—IS TO LOVE LIFE,
EVEN WHEN YOU SUFFER, BECAUSE LIFE IS ALL.

LEO TOLSTOY

Disharmony in the world caused by religious differences
is the result of our failure to understand that
religion is One, truth is One, and God is One. . . .

HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN

As we are liberated from our own fears,
our presence automatically liberates others.

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

WHEN PAIN IS BORNE, A LITTLE COURAGE HELPS
MORE THAN MUCH KNOWLEDGE,
A LITTLE HUMAN SYMPATHY
MORE THAN MUCH COURAGE,
AND THE LEAST TINCTURE OF THE LOVE OF GOD
MORE THAN ALL.

C.S. LEWIS

THE PAIN OF THE WORLD WILL SEAR AND BREAK OUR HEARTS BECAUSE WE CAN NO LONGER KEEP THEM CLOSED. WE'VE SEEN TOO MUCH NOW. TO SOME DEGREE OR OTHER, WE HAVE SURRENDERED INTO SERVICE AND ARE WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE OF COMPASSION.

RAM DASS

LOVE IS THE BASIS, THE FOUNDATION FOR EVERYTHING,
FOR IT IS A VIRTUE THAT IS BLIND TO HUMAN MISTAKES,
AND IS NEVER OFFENDED.

PETER DEUNOV

WHATEVER KIND OF SEED IS SOWN IN THE FIELD,
PREPARED IN DUE SEASON, A PLANT OF THAT SAME KIND,
MARKED WITH THE PECULIAR QUALITIES OF THE SEED,
SPRINGS UP IN IT.

GURU NANAK

The shape of life is not a given:
it is what we make of it.

RABBI LAWRENCE HOFFMAN

OUR PRIME PURPOSE IN THIS LIFE IS TO HELP OTHERS.
AND IF YOU CAN'T HELP THEM, AT LEAST DON'T HURT THEM.

THE DALAI LAMA

PRAYER IS NOTHING ELSE THAN BEING ON TERMS
OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD.

TERESA OF AVILA

Eternal Faith

EMILY GOLDBERG

Life can change in the blink of an eye. One day, you can be content and overjoyed with what you have and the next day be left with absolutely nothing. While there are no distinct patterns for the changes in life, it is up to us to make the best of these situations.

Just two weeks ago, my good friends had everything they needed in life and they appreciated their many blessings. They were living happily with two loving parents and in a firm relationship with God. Their family was optimistic and kind-hearted. They had no reason to feel empty or doubtful. Then suddenly, with no forewarning, life changed for this family in the blink of an eye. Just one week ago, a sense of emptiness fell over my friends' home, as due to various health issues, they lost their mother and are now counted among the other "mourners of Zion."

Since the funeral, one set of reoccurring thought has crossed my mind every time I see them: Where was God during all of this? What did my friends do to deserve the sadness brought into their home? Why must they feel this sudden suffering in just one week? How do we, as the friends and family, sustain enough faith in order to encourage mourners to keep faith?

While I usually turn to the Book of Job for comfort, the verses just seemed so nonchalant in regards to this particular tragic situation. Usually after a loss of something minor, I would think of the famous verse in the first chapter, *Adonai natan v'Adonai lakach, y'hi shem Adoni y'vorach*, or "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." But God couldn't have just "taken away" the beautiful mother of my friends so casually. It's safe to say that though

I am naïve, I do not understand the thoughts that must run through God's mind before giving and taking.

While I struggled with my faith under these circumstances, my two friends remained unusually optimistic. I've seen more smiles than tears, more memories shared than silence, and more laughter than fits of anger. Of course there was initial sadness that a wonderful life was lost, but now, there is more happiness when thinking about the wonderful life that has lived, and will continue to live through the optimism inside my friends.

Rather than turning to atheism, my friend taught me a valuable lesson from this tragedy. She encouraged me never to feel regretful in life and never to take anyone for granted. Life can change in the blink of an eye, but the memories and love

> It is tragic galvanizing moments that unite us.

you feel with people are everlasting. She even trusts God to help her carry her mother's legacy forward, while others would usually turn to doubt. Just one week ago, I was inspired by someone who appreciates life even after the shock she experienced. Today, I feel blessed.

Since then, I have yet to find any theological answers about the mysteries of life. I have yet to find the cures for cancers, illnesses, and other medical procedures that change lives so quickly. I have yet to miraculously relieve the state of shock that was suddenly brought into my friends' home. I have, however, formed a new respect for the optimism expressed by the friends and family of these mourners. I have felt a new level of pride for my local Jewish community that gathered every night of the week to form a *minyan*, or stable support system for this family. While we all grieve this loss, we all still carry a sense of hope

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that can assuage the shock and sadness that entered our lives just one week ago. Perhaps rather than relating the verse in Job to one person, we can relate it to the feeling of happiness that affects us every day. Perhaps God gives us instant and evident happiness on some days, and happiness that we must delve into further on other days. I realized this past week, happiness wasn't as evident as a materialistic pleasure or the joy of having everything we needed, but indirect happiness was found through the strong community formed around this family, and the sense of hope discovered within it. Never again will I take anyone in my community for granted.

It is the tragic, galvanizing moments like this that unite us. On September 11, we will commemorate the earth-shaking terrorist attack that occurred on that random day in

New York City, just ten short years ago. Life changed for the world in a matter of seconds. I was comforted in that dark day to see compassionate reactions from people across the world. While igniting utter sadness in our country, the 9/11 disaster united all grieving families and victims of terrorism.

From this moment forward, I can only pray for more comfort and love to be sent not only to my friends' home, but all the grieving homes affected by the devastating violence in 2001. I pray that God will send clarity and reason to these families, to help them understand why such shock entered and remains present in their lives. I pray that we will take the wise words of my optimistic friend to heart and never take anyone for granted. Lastly, I pray that we, citizens of both the Jewish and American community, will be able to find happiness even in the darkest of times, creating hope for the future, taking comfort in knowing there is a reason for every event that happens in life, and a community that we can access for support. Life can change in the blink of an eye, but the faith and hope found within a community are enduring. SJ

Emily Goldberg is a student at the David Posnack Hebrew Day School in South Florida. She is an avid writer and is passionate about making the connections between the different religions. She hopes to pursue religious studies, social action, and leadership. www.faithleaping.blogspot.com

CONNECT—

Join our Online Community!

Fellowship In Prayer maintains that peace in our world and hope for the future resides in a global community of prayer. When you join our Online Community you will be able to connect with others to share spiritual practices within and across religious traditions as a path to more effective and compassionate social action.

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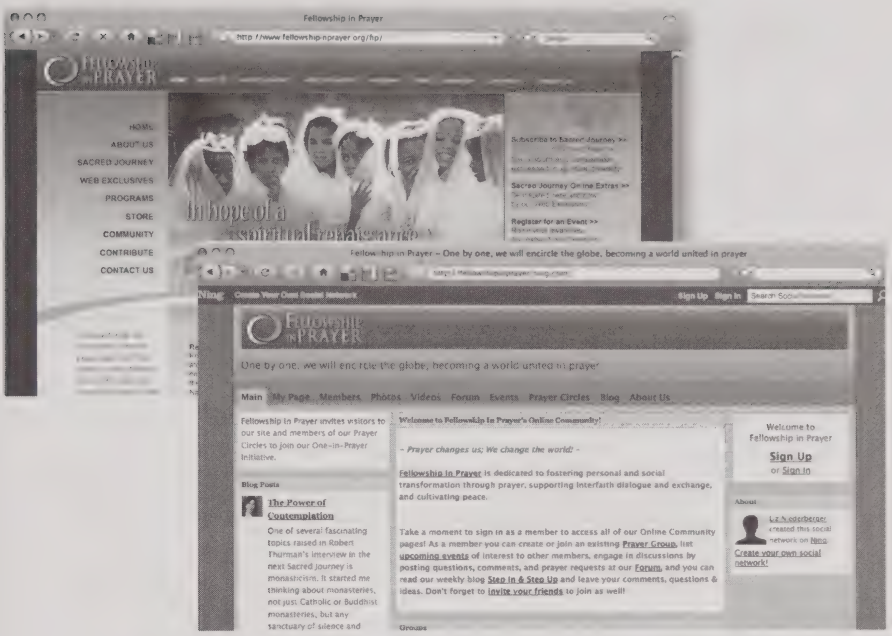
To make it even easier for you to participate when you join Fellowship In Prayer's Online Community, you can elect to receive One-in-Prayer weekly email updates.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Fellowship in Prayer invites visitors to our site and members of our Prayer Circles to join our One-in-Prayer Initiative.
Blog Posts
The Power of Contemplation
One of several fascinating topics raised in Robert Thurman's interview in the next Sacred Journey is monasticism. It started me thinking about monasteries, not just Catholic or Buddhist monasteries, but any sanctuary of silence and
Welcome to Fellowship In Prayer's Online Community!
– Prayer changes us; We change the world! –
Fellowship in Prayer is dedicated to fostering personal and social transformation through prayer, supporting interfaith dialogue and exchange, and cultivating peace.
Take a moment to sign in as a member to access all of our Online Community pages! As a member you can create or join an existing Prayer Group, list upcoming events of interest to other members, engage in discussions by posting questions, comments, and prayer requests at our Forum, and you can read our weekly blog Step In & Step Up and leave your comments, questions & ideas. Don't forget to invite your friends to join as well!
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Step In & Step Up

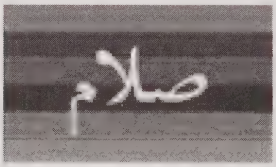
Be sure to read our blog! Join us in reflecting on the interface between spiritual practice and today's social issues. Consider the wisdom found in our religious diversity.

Join the conversation. Share your story; offer your perspective; comment on *Sacred Journey*.

Let's all **Step In** to spiritual awareness and **Step Up** to meet today's challenges!

A Muslim Prayer for Peace

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful.
Praise be to the Lord of the Universe
who has created us and made us into tribes and nations
That we may know each other,
not that we may despise each other.
If the enemy incline towards peace,
do thou also incline toward peace,
and trust God, for the Lord is the one
that heareth and knoweth all things.
And the servants of God,
Most gracious are those
who walk on the Earth in humility
and when we address them, we say



PEACE

From the Islamic Society of North America.

My Prayer

WINIFRED HOY

Do you need proof of God?
Do you light a candle to see the sun?

Oh Lord, in the midst of my doubts
I look around and see
your awesome power displayed.
I see evidence of your infinite presence
in this world, and in the unending reaches of the Universe.
I call your name,
and your love enfolds me like a sweet-sounding melody.
Your peace, soft as the glistening snowflakes,
falls upon my soul.
It cleanses me of all doubt.
I bow down before you.
You are the light before it is ever seen.
You are the word before it is ever spoken.
You are love before it was ever known.
You are Jehovah.
Amen

Winifred Hoy was born and raised in Northern Ireland. She began writing in her sixties *and* her works have been read on National Public Radio, performed on stage and she is a regular contributor to *Julien's Journal*. She currently resides with her husband in CA.

Mother Mary, Queen of All Hearts

TIMOTHY PITROF

It is still dark...
And in the morning I shall ask her . . .

The sun set last in an evening sky of
Light blue and feathery pink,
With the promise that a new day would come,
A resplendent new day . . .

And it should begin in peace,
And be blessed with life;
A day like all others,
And like no other ever before . . .

In the dawning,
I shall ask her for thy Grace.

Timothy Pitrof lives and writes in Hales Corners, Wisconsin.

Why I Give Thanks

BARBARA MAKAY

For Anne Day

In darkest times you gave me light

Your steady wisdom made me see
a new way to survive the night

You strung star ropes to hinder me
from falling off the spinning earth

You calmed the planet, held me tight
with prayer and reality:

a sister, so many memories

a consciousness of love

from birth

A native of Garden City, New York, Barbara Makay is a drama critic in Washington, D.C., where she lives with her son, Alexander. She offers this prayer in loving remembrance of her sister, Anne Day, who died in May 2009.

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constant communion

EMMA CHURCHMAN

my prayer
is for constant communion

my prayer
is for the stillness of love and truth
to settle into this place
and into our bodies

my prayer
is for the movements of the universe
to know this as sacred space

my prayer
is for constant communion

Emma M. Churchman is a Quaker minister, healer, multi-media artist and writer who resides in Indiana. She serves on the faculty of Earlham College, a Quaker liberal arts college, and is pursuing her Master of Divinity from Earlham School of Religion.

Essential Questions

NAN WATKINS

Perhaps the biggest change in my life since I have retired is my relationship with time. In my working years, time had always seemed in short supply. I was frequently racing against time; I tried not to waste time; I wanted to make the most of my time. Now that I am no longer tied to a salaried job with constant deadlines, I have the time to savor time: to relish the moment, take delight in the hour, hold dear the cycles of the year. I have time to dream, to remember, to ponder how I am living my life and who I am.

As a child, my perspective on time was not unlike what I'm feeling now. Time was slower then, too. I could enjoy the long summer afternoons spent with my friends. I took time to marvel at the raindrops dancing on West Maple Avenue, the street in front of the house where I grew up in Pennsylvania. I loved the extended conversations my family had over leisurely evening meals.

As a young girl, I was mulling over the same questions I continue to ask myself today. I keep circling back to essentials, checking to see if I have the same answers to my fundamental questions, or if I have somehow changed over the years. From the start I was not drawn to the existential question of why I am here on this planet. I do not ask the meaning of life or become excited by theological debate. Rather, I have always accepted my life as a brilliant gift. I am kin to the lilies of the field, sharing a beginning, middle, and end to life. I recognize how small I am in the grand plan of the universe. I am simply thankful that I am.

The two central questions that I do ask myself are: How do I want to live my life? and, Who am I? I realized early that I had a choice in how I

wanted to live, and that I did not want to live by default. The *how* or the *journey* is more important to me than the *what* or the *destination*. I could have pursued any number of different paths, but I was clear that whatever I did, I wanted to do well.

I was fortunate to be raised by Quaker parents in a Quaker community. I was filled with ideals at an early age. I lived among tolerant and enlightened elders who taught me the virtues of simplicity, harmony, cooperation, and loving kindness. My early focus was more outward than inward, on learning to live peacefully with my family and my neighbors, on helping those in need. Yet, I hasten to say that Quakers are as prone to problems as anyone else. We had our disagreements, our frustrations, our shortcomings, but the important thing is that we worked to develop the skills to solve our problems; we learned patience, clear thinking, nonviolence, and when necessary, passive resistance.

What I have brought with me from my Quaker childhood is the answer to my first question: How do I want to live my life? Quakers have no creed, but they preach what they practice. And they practice what Christ preached on a mountaintop some 2,000 years ago. When I came to the point where I consciously asked myself how I wanted to live my life as an adult, I decided that the Quaker values I had learned in my first eighteen years were what I would strive to practice throughout my life. I have not changed my mind on this.

> Respect the divine spark that inhabits all life.

The challenge has been in learning to show compassion for people who do not practice these values, for people who have had radically different upbringings from mine. It takes intense listening to understand why some people resort quickly

to violence and abuse. I am tested when I must respond to the impatience or anger in others, as well as within myself. But I have been lucky and have not felt the need to rebel or to cast off the burden of a difficult childhood, as many people I have met have had to do. I acknowledge that I myself have not been tested by personal hardship or hunger or injustice or poor health; I have never been homeless or imprisoned or forced to live under tyranny or among warring populations. But it is the teaching of the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh that reminds me how important it is that we recognize the suffering of others, that we show compassion to people in all walks of life.

Thich Nhat Hanh is one of the heroes I have revered over the years. The very first who captured my attention was Gandhi, that frail man who taught the modern world the art of passive resistance against an oppressor. I can still see the old photos of Gandhi, dressed in white muslin, leading his people on the march to the sea to reclaim the salt themselves, thus breaking free from the stiff British salt tax. My second hero was Albert Schweitzer, whose philosophy is summed up with the phrase "Reverence for Life." He practiced what he preached in his hospital in Equatorial Africa when he said, "Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man himself will not find peace." As a girl, I admired William Penn and his determination to build a "Greene Country Towne" of Brotherly Love just a few miles from where I lived. As I grew older I was emboldened by the courage of Martin Luther King in standing up to severe abuses with nonviolent protest, and I watched in amazement how Nelson Mandela focused his strength on freeing his people from the tyranny of a privileged minority. My earliest woman hero was Marion Longshore, a Quaker spinster who lived down the street of my childhood and who made many of the abstract Quaker values real for me.

Now to return to my second question: Who am I? I was very young when I was taught in First Day School to "love thy neighbor as thyself." That was the first time I remember confronting the notion of self. Even in the silent meditation of my early Quaker meetings, I was thinking more about others than about myself. What could I do for other people, how should I interact with them? In time, I began to realize that my self must be as important as the self of others, if I was told to love my self as much as my neighbor.

It must have been during high school when I first heard of the inscription over the ancient Temple of Apollo in Delphi, Greece. The two words that captured my attention, translated into English, were: Know Thyself. How simple, yet profound! I was so attracted to those two words that I carried them with me wherever I went. Whether I was sunbathing on a rock in the Poconos, or walking the sands along the Atlantic beaches of New Jersey, or joining Quaker weekend work camps in the worst poverty in Philadelphia, I would ponder the command to discover my self. In my college years I studied in Europe, and it was important for me to make the pilgrimage to the remains of that temple in Delphi, where I contemplated the eternal mystery: Know Thyself.

I think I am, for the most part, still that adventurous, inquisitive self who started life back in Pennsylvania. Though I have known loss and sorrow as anyone my age knows, I still love the challenge of the new day. I continue to respect that divine spark that inhabits all people and all life, as George Fox and Thomas Berry have taught us. I tend toward cooperation rather than competition. I am inclusive rather than exclusive. I am most comfortable with a group decision made by consensus rather than a win/lose vote. I admire the physician's motto: "Above all, do no harm." I am quick to discard the use of harmful tactics in pursuit of some perceived good. And it pains me that the dark side of

religious doctrine has so often been used as an intolerant tool to oppress others. I take as my personal icon the tree of life.

In my various travels I have worshiped in churches, meetinghouses, cathedrals, synagogues, and mosques of the three major monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam. I have knelt in reverence at temples of polytheistic religions—Hinduism and the religion of the ancient Greeks. I have prayed in Buddhist *stupas* in Nepal, with a Quechua shaman on a Peruvian mountaintop, in the remains of a Jain monastery in the desert of India, under live oak trees at a Wicca wedding, under pine trees at a Menominee ceremony. In all these places I have felt the presence of the sacred, and I rejoice that within our diversity we have much in common.

I remain forever thankful for the tolerant childhood that cradled my self. As so many before me, I feel the tug of those early days still influencing my later days. I'm pleased to have the time now to reflect on these things, to enjoy the present, and to work toward making a good future for my grandchildren and all the children of the world. Amidst the strife, there's a world of hope and beauty out there. Praises be! SJ

Since retiring from her work as a reference librarian in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, Nan Watkins continues to pursue her lifelong interests in music and literature. Her love of travel is shared in her memoir, *East Toward Dawn: A Woman's Solo Journey Around the World.*

Silent Blessings

MICHAEL ROUSSEAU

About eighteen years ago, I was staying at La Sonnerie in Dordogne, France, which was the French residence of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. People would come from all over the world to hear his teachings. He lived there for one or two months at a time. Often Khyentse Rinpoche would just start teaching or giving a transmission and anyone who was there had to come within minutes if they wanted to hear it. It didn't matter whether there were three or thirty people—if the teachings were flowing he would just teach. The primary purpose was to give transmissions to the young *tulkus* and the students entering the three-year retreat, but of course the teaching was open to the others as well.

At the same time Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche was also living there, he was teaching the students in three-year retreat. Back then, most people didn't know who he really was, a secret master, completely anonymous. He later became the teacher of Sogyal Rinpoche and others.

One day I was very sad because of difficulty with a relationship and I was sitting on the grass crying. Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche saw me and came over and sat down beside me on the grass. Khenpo Rinpoche could only speak by whispering—and he couldn't speak French or English at all. Even so, he talked to me through hand signs, whispering, and mimicking. I remember he was waving his arms around and blowing with his lips to indicate how big and spacious the sky was, and he pointed to his smile to indicate I should cheer up. He was so simple and it was all very clear, even though he was only using signs and facial expressions. He just sat down on the grass and opened my mind.

A few years later, I often drove him in my car to visit some students in retreat. My dog was often in the car and unfortunately had chewed up the seats, so the car was really a mess. But Khenpo Rinpoche just got in the car with the dog and was perfectly happy. It never mattered what the situation was. Once, on the way back he asked me to wait. We parked near a bluff that had a beautiful view, and we just sat there, looking at the sky and not talking. He was so simple, with absolutely no protocol. In fact, he was teaching me how to meditate. It was wonderful to have a master like that.

Sometimes when Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche was in Paris, he liked to be in the Métro or in the street because there he could see people in their ordinary lives. It would always amaze me that he could just go up to somebody and touch the material of their clothes very lightly, and it would never bother people because he was so natural, happy and smiling. He was just spontaneously curious, a little bit like a child, about anything new and interesting, such as a new fabric. In fact, I think it was also his way to connect with people, and I'm sure they were receiving a blessing without even knowing it! He just had the ability to be everywhere and anywhere, with a look in his eyes always so full of compassion and kindness.

Excerpted from *The Power of Compassion: Stories that Open the Heart, Heal the Soul and Change the World*, compiled and edited by Pamela Bloom © 2010 Hampton Roads Publishing and printed with permission. www.redwheelweiser.com

The Power of One Sheep

MARK PLUNKETT

One of the things I loved during my classes at Princeton Seminary was what I call the second question. Many times the first question asked either by the professor or student is a good one but I have found the second question is often the better one.

When we examine the Scripture reading on The Lost Sheep, the first question is a rather obvious one:

Why does the Lord bother to save one sheep when he already has ninety-nine safely with him?

My message focuses on the second question:

For what PURPOSE does the Lord save that one little sheep?

This is the question that comes to mind when I read this passage. Each of us is that one sheep, that one out of a hundred that wanders off and almost gets away.

And each of us is important enough for the Good Shepherd to leave the 99 other sheep and come after us. When the Shepherd finds us, do we get a holy lecture? A stern talking-to? A little time out? This is not what Scripture says. We are told the Good Shepherd is happy! There has to be a reason for such joy.

Perhaps, you are going for the obvious answer: the Lord comes to rescue us and is happy because the Lord loves us. I agree with this analysis. It would be foolish to think otherwise.

Once rescued, however, what does the Lord have in mind for us? What can one little sheep do?

Maybe you are to be one famous, heroic little sheep like Bobby Greene, an ordinary man from Los Angeles, California. On Wednesday, April 29, 1992, he was watching the riots following the acquittal of the four policemen who had beaten

Rodney King. This one sheep saw, live on television, a man being dragged from his truck and beaten with bricks by a mob who would have surely killed him. Bobby Greene realized the scene was playing out on the street right in front of his house! Bobby rushed out into the middle of the mob, completely unarmed, and rescued the badly injured truck driver. He loaded the driver back into his truck and drove the truck, carrying twenty-seven tons of sand, to the hospital, saving the driver's life. Maybe you are going to be this kind of sheep.

Or maybe you are to be a little sheep who lives a very, very long time, over 100 years. You live in a nursing home that is not really one of the nice ones. But every day, since you can still walk, read, and think, you take it upon yourself to make rounds. You go from room to room asking if anyone needs anything. You sit and visit those who can't get out of bed. You read letters to those who can't see to read any longer. You read Scripture to those who will listen and you even discuss it with them . . . a little one-on-one ministering with those who have no one to talk to. You make a difference just by being yourself—your plain, old, ordinary self—maybe you are the sheep that brightens the day and serves as an inspiration for a community many have forgotten. Maybe you are going to be that type of sheep.

> Why does the Lord bother to save one sheep when he already has ninety-nine safely with him?

Or maybe you are going to be like one big sheep I heard about many years ago. That particular sheep was a very tall, very large man. He sold insurance in the Houston area. I don't know his name, and I don't know if he was any good at selling insurance. But I suspect that

selling insurance was not what the Lord had in mind when he rescued that one big sheep. For you see . . . this particular sheep goes to the county jail on Sunday afternoons after church. He goes from cell to cell asking softly if he can make a call, if anyone would like a word of prayer, a word from Scripture. As he passes by, the whole jail gets a little quieter. The jailers will tell you that "Rev," as he is known, is a welcome sight and that he does good work, but "Rev" is a fake. He is not a minister of Word and Sacrament. He is not a minister at all, even though he wears a clerical collar. He will tell you the collar is just to get their attention. The real reason he is there is because his Shepherd told him to visit those sheep in jail. No one else in the Houston area does this. Maybe you are going to be that type of sheep.

I keep using the word *one* and when I say that, I am certain there are a lot of *ones* who are uncomfortable. After all, it is always easier in this world to let others be the *one* the Good Shepherd uses to further the Kingdom. Let me declare that each and every sheep is called to be the *one*.

You don't have to be Bobby Greene rushing into a murderous mob to save a man from death. You don't have to be the sweet old lady in the nursing home. You don't have to be the insurance salesman who visits the jail pretending to be a minister. No one is asking you to be that particular *one*.

Maybe the wonderful things, the important things, the things that any of us is called to do are really very small! Maybe opportunities simply appear and we hear the Lord telling us to do something.

You might be the *one* who reaches for your wallet when you see a working man crying, as he asks for food for the first time. You might ignore other pleas for help but there is something about this one man that resonates with you. Maybe you remember going hungry at some time in your life and getting a hand up from someone, instead of just a hand out.

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You might be the *one* who begins every conversation with, "How's your family?" What a silly question! "How's your family?" But then maybe one day everything is NOT okay with the person whose family you're asking about. Maybe their family is the biggest, heaviest thing on their heart. And maybe, just maybe no one else has noticed or asked. So when you ask, "How's your family?" maybe they can begin talking and get some things off their chest. Maybe you're the one sheep who asks, "How's your family?" and will listen and be a good friend for a few moments.

Or maybe you are the one in the classroom; on the job; walking with others; driving the roads; sitting in a small restaurant; or perhaps on-line with your friends—the Good Shepherd needs you to do a little something. You just might be that *one* sheep.

The power you have in that situation; the power to make a difference; to spread the Good News in the world;

to be a shining example; to show the love of the Good Shepherd exists, is alive and well . . . this is a power like no other.

As each one of us tries to follow the Lord's path, look for the opportunities that will certainly come your way and be the *one* sheep with the power to make a difference—the difference between something and nothing; between good and evil; love and indifference; the powerful and the powerless. *One* little sheep can do all that.

You have been rescued, you *one* little sheep.

Your Good Shepherd left the flock and rescued you.

Why did the Lord bother to save one sheep when he already has 99 safely with him? That is the first question.

But answer the second question:

For what PURPOSE does the Lord save you, that one little sheep? SJ

Mark Plunkett taught school for over twenty years until he began to explore a call to the ministry. He recently graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary and has returned to his home in TX where he hopes to minister in his community. In his spare time, Mark enjoys ballroom dancing with his wife Jeannie.

A Liturgy for 9-11

ALDEN SOLOVY

Prayer is an act of *summoning* light.
Blessing is an act of *bending* light.
Communion is the act of *entering* light.

Light is a universal metaphor for Divine energy, a symbol for holiness, truth, radiance, eminence, love. To pray is to summon Divine light into our lives. To bless is an attempt to summon that light and then to bend it toward holy purpose, including consolation, healing, joy and peace. Communion is the attempt to journey into the light of holiness, awe and wonder.

The towers of light illuminating the night sky where the twin towers once stood represent the resiliency of the human spirit, the transformative power of hope and compassion. As we mark this 10th Anniversary of 9/11, the editors of SACRED JOURNEY invite you to light a candle and bless the memory of those who on September 11, 2001 were on the airplanes, in targeted buildings and zones, the first responders, the family members who lost loved ones and everyone across the nation, indeed the world, who witnessed the terror. We invite you to pray, and then "bend that light to holy purpose" with an intentional act of kindness.

Alden Solovy is a liturgist, poet, essayist, teacher, editor and writing coach. His fiction has appeared in the Jewish and secular press. This prayer was written for *Tzeh U'limad*, the post-rabbinic education blog of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. To read the full 9-11 liturgy and additional prayers and resources for rabbis and congregations that may be useful for a 9-11 commeration, please visit: http://tobendlight.com/2011/04/28/a-liturgy-for-9-11/
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FOR 9-11 SURVIVORS

G-d of the survivor,
G-d of the mourner and the witness,
Grant solace and peace to those still held by physical,
emotional and spiritual distress from the attacks of 9-11.
Release them from visions of death and destruction,
from guilt or shame, from fear or anger.
Bind their wounds with Your steadfast love.
Lift them on Your wings of kindness and grace.

Blessed are those who have found peace.
Blessed are those without tranquility.

Blessed are those who speak.
Blessed are those who stay silent.

Blessed are those who have healed.
Blessed are those who suffer.

Blessed are those who forgive.
Blessed are those who cannot forgive.

Blessed are You, Adonai our G-d,
Source of strength for survivors of violence and tragedy
in every land and in every age.
Blessed are You, Rock of Israel, Source of hope and comfort.

How Interfaith Encounters Help Me Dare to Hope

SARRAH SHAHAWY

Faith. *Foi. Iman. Fe. Emunah. Yakeen.* One word, with an endless array of layers and meanings. Powerful, defining, and all-encompassing. But what does it mean to have faith? It was the beauty of faith that made Jesus articulate his eternal words: God is love. It was the pursuit of faith that drove Muhammad up to a mountain cave where he would receive God's revelation. It was the search for truth that led Siddaartha to abandon the life of a prince for that of an ascetic. It was through trust in God that Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son on the altar. And it was the search for a future to believe in that drove the Israelites through the Red Sea to freedom. These stories still resonate with us today because we are all looking for something to believe in. We want desperately to believe, to hope, to find meaning where others find none.

My own search for faith began growing up in a conservative Muslim Egyptian-American home, in a religious tradition that has at its core the values of tolerance, diversity, human dignity, peace, justice, and love. My eyes were first opened to the idea of religious pluralism through the Islamic concept of the People of the Book, the Christians and Jews, who are given a special status in Islam because they too received scriptures from God. From there, came the appreciation of all faiths and creeds that share the basic human principles upon which I was raised. God says in the Quran: "O Mankind. Behold. We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know and cherish one another." So there is a reason for our diversity, and it is not to convert or preach, but rather to learn, understand, and grow.

Joining the Interfaith Council at USC and engaging in

dialogue and service became ways in which I could strengthen my own faith, by viewing it through the prism that unites all faiths. In a world where religion is accused of being a source of violence, interfaith work, while celebrating our differences, reminds us of our many common goals: the eradication of hunger, poverty, disease, corruption. We all have friends outside our own religion, but how often do we engage in meaningful discussions around the topic of faith? How often do we ask: What do you believe? and more importantly: How do those beliefs translate into action? By exploring these questions, we strike at the innermost part of our souls and we are surprised to find that not all Christians will give us the same answer, nor will all Jews or Muslims or atheists. We find that we may have more in common with someone of another faith than one of our own.

That is the personal value of interfaith work: we strengthen our respective identities as Jains, Catholics, Hindus, searchers, but we also proclaim that these labels alone are no longer sufficient. I can say I am a Muslim, but I can no longer satisfy myself with that answer. To me, Islam is a way of life, so I must ask myself how it affects my everyday decisions, my general attitude towards life. What drives me to study, to strive, to serve, to smile, to laugh? Not until I have struggled, argued, despaired, and returned, can I begin to claim that I have faith. The Quran recounts the story of nonbelievers who adopt Islam and come to the Prophet, proclaiming, "We have believed." The Prophet responds, "No. Say that you have become Muslim, but faith has yet to enter into your hearts." There lies the distinction between the label and the deeper journey. And as we each embark on our own path, we find that it is more important to justify our belief to ourselves than to others: as the web comic artist wrote, "A million people can call the mountains a fiction, but it need not trouble you as you stand atop them."

For our generation, exclusivism seems obsolete. No one can claim to hold the sole monopoly on truth. I firmly believe

in the teachings of the Quran and the prophet, but my religion commands me to find meaning and value in other religions as well. I find beauty in the Bible's call to love, richness in the history of Jewish traditions, peace in Buddhism's call to compassion, wonder in the message of the Bhagavad Gita, and splendor in the musicality of the Sikh *kirtan*. As a Sufi mystic wrote, "Now my heart has grown capable of taking on many forms: a pasture for gazelles, a convent for Christians, a temple for idols, a *Kaaba* for the pilgrim, a table for the Torah. My religion is love—whichever route love's caravan shall take, that path shall be the path of my faith."

So let us not be afraid to open up to the various traditions and ideologies that surround us, let us not hesitate to explore how these might shed light on our beliefs, and let us not shrink from questioning and testing our own faith. Young as we are, we love to challenge and debate, which are absolutely essential. Just as we cannot know happiness until we have known sorrow, we cannot claim to have faith until it has been tested.

And it is during those tests, when we are at the darkest points and are able to look beyond them into the light of the coming day that we find peace in the affirmation of our faith. This hope and optimism are the practical manifestations of belief, of trust in God. For me, to lose hope is to reject God's words in the Quran when He assures us: "We will never burden a soul with more than it is able to bear." To despair is to reject the divine biblical teaching: "Perfect love drives out fear." And to refuse to see the beauty of this world often governed by what may seem to be the cruelest principles of "survival of the fittest" is to reject Darwin's claim that even so, "there is grandeur in this view of life."

But Faith is to stand in Tintern Abby as William Wordsworth did and know that, as he wrote, "neither evil tongues, rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men, nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all the dreary intercourse of daily life, shall ever prevail against us, or disturb our cheerful faith that all

which we behold is full of blessings." And as we stand in the present world, as it is, we must be filled, he says, "not only with the sense of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts that in this moment there is life and food for future years. And so I dare to hope."

He dares to hope. Hope is, by its very nature, an act of defiance. It is not easy, it is not simple, it is not born out of ignorance or naiveté. It is born out of the ashes of doubt, of despair, of trial, of some kind of suffering, at any level, hidden or exposed, in whatever way we experience it. Happiness is to be fully cognizant of this suffering, the corruption, the injustice that plagues our world and to nevertheless stare down those cruel realities and in rebellion, exclaim: I still dare to hope. Because this is not it. This can be better. We each have a responsibility and the ability to make it better and this commitment to service, to something greater than ourselves, is our faith in practice.

So I pray that we, the USC graduating Class of 2011, have the power to do that: the force to explore our inner faith, the daring to find our own unique path, and the courage to ensure that our conviction becomes action. So dare to dream. Dare to believe. Dare to hope.

Sarrah Shahawy graduated at the top of her class from University of Southern California obtaining the coveted valedictorian status. She was president of USC's Student Interfaith Council and was instrumental in having the Dalai Lama speak at USC this past May. Sarrah is a first generation Egyptian American, fluent in Arabic and French. She will attend Harvard Medical School in the fall of 2011. This was Sarrah's Baccalaureate address and used with her permission.

Mission Impossible

FARIDA SAMERKHANOVA

Choked with rage and hatred,
He dreams of burning the Holy Book.
He cannot predict
That making it public
Stimulates the motley
Multi-religious world
To read it again and again.

He wants to destroy it
As an act of protest and denial
Not realizing that even if
All Qu'rans were burnt all together,
Every surah will be restored
By joint effort of millions
Who know it by heart.

Farida Samerkhanova was born in Ufa, Bashkortostan. She lives in Toronto, Ontario. English is her third language after Tatarian and Russian. She raises her grandson who also writes poems and short stories. She enjoys ice skating, playing chess, kniting and collecting coins. Her work was published by more than forty literary journals in Canada, USA, United Kingdom and Turkey.

Inspiration

PATRICIA DUNN-FIERSTEIN

At first sight I simply saw a cumulous
cloud picture in the sky and thought, Isn't that nice.

Then feathers formed on high and her enormous
white wings flapped their virgin flight
right into my astonished heart.

Her breast pressed into my chest and I held her
like a young child holds her new baby sister—
clumsy and curious.

Ether coursed through me—tingles pulsing
like some kundalini from heaven.
She lay still . . . .
waiting for me to breathe
life into her emerging soul. So I did!

Fueled by some invisible force
she lifted off my mortal frame,
took flight into the world
while I lay dazed and wonder-filled,
wholly spilled by grace.

Patricia Dunn-Fierstein, LCSW, CST-T, has been a psychotherapist working with children and adults in Tampa, FL for twenty-six years. She is a Certified Sandplay Therapist-Teacher. She is a contributing author to *Supervision of Sandplay Therapy,* ed: Freedman and Mitchell, as well as other publications. She is married with two grown sons and uses poetry to nurture her relationship with the Divine.

Regatta

TERRI MACKENZIE

Tall, tapered triangles, dozens, bright white,
enhance the sun-drenched lake.
When wind and sails connect,
canvas sheets form cresent moons.

Sailors catch the breeze and travel north—
except a few, confused or unskilled.
Three seem immobile and one tacks east,
unwilling or unable to be wind-controlled.

Who out there would guess
I'm watching from my window
as each ship sails past my vision,
vanishing into lush limbs of shore-lined trees.

Summer Spirit sent these boats to me,
nameless tutors inviting sight and insight.
I peer through glass and through the ages
to find light about my place in the race.

I am the leader and I am the last,
I stay the course and I am lost,
I follow paths enabled by the Breath of Life
though sometimes I feel still and stagnant.

Eons ago I came from fertile seas;
decades ago from womb-waters.
I house the water; it ebbs in me:
tides and moonbeams move my moods.

Memories of missing sailmates
skim the waters of my heart
splashing joy and loss relentlessly.
They will always travel with me.

We had no choice in starting this race;
we have no say about our final dock.
My finish line is out of view, yet getting nearer.
Precious the ride until I disembark!

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A sister of SHCJ, Terri MacKenzie's ministry encompasses ways to help others believe that God lives and acts in them and in our world: especially through our cosmic story, related scientific insights and our call to care for creation. Terri can see Lake Michigan from the windows of her Chicago home.

before rainbows

TRILLA RAMAGE

have you forgotten?

there was a time
before rainbows.

when noah knew no expanse
of water larger than a well.
before he heard the lullaby
of waves lapping against the ark.

a time of harsh trials;
a time without bearings.
when men knew only the emptiness
—or the fullness—of their selves.

yes, there was a time
before the rainbow's promise.

god's covenant, a resplendent tourmaline,
plucked from the heart
of inner storms unrelenting
in darkness & plagued by dragons.

yes, god's promise
unabashedly adorns clearing skies:
beautiful and endearing

for those who remember to seek,
for those who will lift their eyes.

Currently a Virginian, Trilla Ramage is an award-winning poet, a wordsmith by trade, her life is enriched by strong ties to Christian and Judaic traditions.

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Listened When There Were No Words to be Heard

SARAH BYRNE

I met Martha when she was recovering from cardiac surgery on the Intensive Care Unit. She would reach out to anyone who passed by her bed. Her nurse told me that she was "needy." A tightly fitted oxygen mask precluded conversation, but her wide, teary eyes cried out for companionship.

I introduced myself to Martha and then sat beside her. As she grasped my hand tightly I noticed a rosary dangling on her bed rails, and offered a prayer for comfort and healing. At the end of the visit, she scrawled on a pad: "Come back."

The next day I met Martha's daughter, who informed me that her father, Martha's husband of forty-five years, had died the week before. Suddenly, I understood what was behind the pleading eyes. Martha was acutely, deeply grieving.

Martha, while aware and alert, was on a ventilator due to complications in her recovery. She could not speak, and her hands were losing their ability even to scrawl. This presented a challenging pastoral situation. I wondered, "How can I help her grieve when she can't express herself? How can she lament without a voice?"

I sought to provide a safe, compassionate place in which to address Martha's grief, where we could draw upon her long-practiced faith as a resource. At the next visit I raised the subject of her husband's death and her eyes widened as she began crying and patting my hand. She appeared deeply sad and relieved. I believe that she wanted someone to address her grief, which was at the forefront of her thoughts and engulfing her heart.

Over the next several weeks, I sought to give voice to Martha's loss as best as I could, humbly and gently. I was treading on sacred ground. I read Psalms reflecting the grief I

imagined: I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched (Ps. 69).

I was mindful of these 'deep waters,' and I was careful not to leave Martha in the midst of them at the end of our visits. I voiced her anger and sadness while offering hope and trust in God, following a theme we often see in the Psalms. Many affirm God's love in the midst of tears: How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? . . . I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation (Ps. 13).

As professional chaplains, we are called to offer a courageous listening presence. When there are no words to be heard, we listen at the 'heart' level, drawing upon our shared experiences of love, loss, and grief. We give voice to what must be said.

Martha and I had many conversations consisting of nods, hand squeezes, tears, and Psalms, though I never did hear her voice. After two months in Intensive Care, she passed away. She and her husband were buried next to each other—reunited, I believe, with the God who listens and loves us in deep waters.

Sarah Byrne received her M. Div. from Harvard Divinity School. She is a Board-Certified Chaplain accredited by the Association of Professional Chaplains. She serves as staff chaplain for Sutter Care at Home Hospice in Oakland, CA. This story originally appeared in *The Beacon*, the bulletin of HealthCare Chaplaincy, a multifaith leader in the research, education, and practice of palliative care, which matches treatment to patient goals. For more information, visit www.healthcarechaplaincy.org

One God—One Syllable

ALBERT LEWIS

If God were to speak to you, what would you hear? If God stood in front of you, what would you see and how would you know it as God? If in the night, in a dream, God were to say; "I must share a thought with you . . . tell you how I feel," would you grasp it as truth or as one of the strange thoughts that comes with the night? If you sit to read a book, and in the midst of the page know you must call or write a note to say "thank you" or "I care," would you have heard the voice of God? If, as you walk on a path and chance to look down and see some small bee or worm just in front—where your next foot step will go—would you change your course and feel pleased that you so chose? Would you ask: "What led me to look down and why now?" Or would you not ask, stay the course and miss the gift of awe: that life and death were in your grasp . . . and the choice was yours?

In each of us there is a spark that lights more times than our heart beats. When we sit in the midst of calm and will to breathe the pure, clear air—a flame from that spark glows and sends warmth and deep truth. If we grasp that truth with heart, soul and mind we may sense it as a time when God speaks. If we are numb to its sound—too much in the mire of self and "I want," "I need," "I fear," some part of us goes deaf to words more than our own. But the spark still glows and the warm words wait for us . . . and seek a time when we may not know as the mind knows, yet feel as God hopes and waits. And in that oh so brief time the pulse of life flows in and through us, the flame glows, God speaks and is heard and the spark glows with life and love . . . and the world, as much as we can know it, is at peace. SJ

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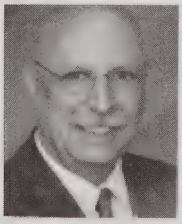

Albert M. Lewis is the author of *Soul Sounds: Reflections on Life* and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Emmanuel in Grand Rapids, MI. His articles appear in five Michigan newspapers. He is a consultant to nursing homes and retirement communities. To learn more visit www.soulsoundsbook.com

New York Says Thank You

COMPILED AND EDITED: JANET M. HAAG

"It was the best of times and the worst of times"—wrote Charles Dickens at the beginning of *The Tale of Two Cities.* His is an observation that certainly rings true in light of any tragedy. We witnessed the worst of human nature in the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the best of human nature in the outpouring of compassion that took over on 9/12.

Many people are inspired by the generosity and volunteerism that was evident in New York City during the days, weeks and months that followed the terrorist attacks. Fewer people know that New York has been paying it forward ever since, led by several New York City firefighters—one whose first call was to the World Trade Center; the construction superintendent of the Ground Zero cleanup; and an Italian American financial advisor and family man from Staten Island. It was Jeff Parness' five-year-old son, Evan, who happened to see on the news one evening that a devastating wildfire in California had caused families to lose everything. The young boy was especially concerned about the children affected by this disaster and asked his Dad to help him send them clothes and toys. Struck by his son's sensitivity and generous spirit, Jeff decided to enlist the assistance of several friends and organize a response. Their efforts caught the attention of others and what began as a single initiative quickly grew into a movement. Now, every September, a group of New York City firefighters and other New Yorkers personally impacted by the 9/11 tragedy say thank you for the love and support they received by helping others reclaim their lives and their communities following a disaster.

Those who are part of The New York Says Thank You Foundation have helped rebuild homes destroyed by wildfires in southern California; a 140 year old church leveled by

an F3 tornado in Illinois; the tornado-ravaged home of a Texas family who cared for Disabled Veterans for three generations; the residence of a six-year old boy battling leukemia, left homeless after Hurricane Katrina; and a 14,000 square foot 4-H fairground pavilion taken down by an EF5 tornado in Greensburg, Kansas.

This group of volunteers grows every year, as people who have been served join the next effort. Our faith in humanity is restored as dozens of firefighters and volunteers from all walks of life, different cultures and faith, young and old, come together and share their time and talents to help others in need. A grateful nation and a grateful world applaud them!

To learn more about The New York Says Thank You Foundation, visit www.newyorksaysthankyou.org and look for the release of their new documentary in September 2011.

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I am Only a Person Among Others

BRUCE HASSETT

On September 12, 2001 I understood it was midnight in America, that instant between yesterday and tomorrow, between the way things were and the way things would be.

Seeds

Stunned awake at midnight,
We grope for our God of light,
But He is one with us,
One in our common humanity.
So don't look for God in power and shiny things.
Pain's fire is where we bond with Him.
And don't be mistaken, this is no defeat,
Life ascends from beneath twisted monuments of hate,
While hate itself falls victim,
The victim of a cosmic trap.
For out of this suffering
Truth and brotherhood are released
Like the seeds of a dandelion globe.
So take a breath America,
Take a deep breath,
And in their memory blow forth these seeds,
Scatter them on the breath of your spirit. SJ

Bruce Hassett is a retired F.D.N.Y deputy fire chief whose career spanned thirty-two years. He now lives in Charlotte, NC. He says his spiritual journey started in the early 70s during the Catholic charismatic renewal and has evolved over time to a contemplative expression best articulated in the writings of Thomas Merton and Richard Rohr.

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